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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000379

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF A A/S CARTER, AF/SPG, AF/C, AF/E, NSC FOR
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SUBJECT: NCP ITSELF DOESN'T KNOW WHAT IS NEXT, WARNS
FOREIGN MINISTER

REF: KHARTOUM 321

Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Sudanese Foreign Minister Deng Alor warned that President Bashir's own ruling National Congress Party (NCP) "doesn't know what the regime will do next, underscoring the extreme volatility of current decision-making in Sudan. SPLM frustration with the NCP has reached a point that many federal ministers, including himself, may soon be drawn back to Juba to help run South Sudan rather than wasting time in Khartoum. Alor outlined two possible scenarios for further regime action in the coming months, and claimed that the NCP intended to hold a rubber-stamp Presidential Election soon to confirm Bashir's hold on power. End summary.

SPLM MAY GO HOME TO JUBA

¶2. (C) Meeting CDA Fernandez immediately after CDA's return from Darfur on March 17, Sudanese Foreign Minister Deng Alor began by noting that his staff had informed him that they had "disallowed" CDA's travel to Darfur (septel) "something small which illustrates the problem we have here." Alor said that SPLM frustration at the NCP's treatment and unilateral decision-making was close to a breaking point. The SPLM had decided to lower its profile in Khartoum and spend more time in Juba. There is serious party concern about the performance of the Government of South Sudan (GOSS) and key SPLM cadres' time is better spent helping out in Juba than providing window dressing to a farcical Government of National Unity (GNU) in Khartoum. Alor said that there would soon be a GOSS cabinet reshuffle with ministers from the GNU heading south, "probably including me." The FM expressed deep frustration at what he saw as continued NCP marginalizing of the SPLM on a national and international level in matters large and small. He intended to see both VP Taha and President Bashir on March 18 but was pessimistic about any policy changes by the NCP.

¶3. (C) Deng said that the SPLM is analyzing two possible scenarios for current and future NCP behavior. The first is that the NCP will continue to mobilize Islamist fervor in Sudan, increasingly making life difficult for the international community in Sudan, for the SPLM and for the political opposition, "continuously squeezing all independent space in Sudan - political, diplomatic and economic. Under this scenario, vividly illustrated in President Bashir's recent speeches is "to keep the situation boiling." The regime is even escalating, pushing not for ICC Article 16 deferral but for a cancellation of the ICC arrest warrant of Bashir altogether. The NCP is abetted in this adventurism by the misleading and cowardly reaction of both the African Union and the Arab League, "they don't have a clear position

and are stoking the President's arrogance and paranoia." The second scenario is more along the lines of typical NCP behavior, "they are testing the waters to see how much they can get away with, how the West, and especially the Americans will react." This scenario presumes that the NCP is acting in its usual calculating and deliberate manner, carefully calibrating escalation and supposed "concessions."

NCP INSIDERS GAZE INTO THE UNKNOWN

¶4. (C) Most alarming to Alor were recent discussions with his deputy, MFA U/S Muttriff Siddiq and with VP Ali Osman Taha, which revealed that even these key regime insiders have no idea where an emotional and moody Bashir intends to take Sudan. "We don't know what will happen next," he quoted them, expressing their deep frustration at the skewed decision-making process in the NCP which puts a premium at blind loyalty to Bashir rather than survival of the NCP. "Unfortunately Ali is a coward, otherwise he would have already moved against the President," Alor noted. Still he hoped that Taha and NISS Chief Salah Ghosh could somehow get some influence with the Sudanese Armed Forces that would allow them to move against Bashir. "Taha is trying to send the message that he will be subservient to the military if he takes over," but needs to be careful to not be seen as plotting against the President given Bashir's current state of mind.

¶5. (C) Alor described a delegation of pro-NCP splinter parties approaching National Electoral Commission (NEC) head Abel Alier and suggesting that, because of problems with the

KHARTOUM 00000379 002 OF 002

census, comprehensive national elections cannot be held but that a "fair compromise" would be to hold snap presidential elections as soon as possible. Alier immediately informed Salva Kiir as "this is completely unacceptable to the SPLM and to Kiir." Such an election would be a farce used to consolidate Bashir's personal hold on power.

A TIME-OUT PERIOD FOR THE NCP

¶6. (C) The Foreign Minister referred to recent talks he had had with State Department officials and suggested that the USG should give the NCP "a decent interval of time" to define themselves - are they out of control or do they have a reasonable plan, are they serious about talking to the West or not. He suggested that senior officials come to Juba to meet Kiir and Alor, avoiding the NCP and Khartoum for the moment. CDA Fernandez noted that he had recommended a similar course of action to Washington recently. Alor clarified that "the NCP do need to know your intentions and your priorities, but you shouldn't reward them (given their expulsion of Western NGOs and escalating pressure on independent voices in Sudan, both in words and deeds). "Somehow we need to strengthen the moderates in the NCP but that has now become harder than ever."

¶7. (C) Comment: Alor's analysis forecasts considerable instability ahead for Sudan in the coming months, if the "first scenario" is correct. Even without that, an informal SPLM withdrawal from the GNU and a ramrod snap presidential campaign by the NCP will continue to raise the political temperature in the country. However, Sudan is normally turbulent and both the NCP and SPLM routinely work by using crises and escalation as everyday tools of political maneuvering. The possibility that the NCP itself is increasingly fragile and fragmented is both concerning and interesting in that it could eventually present other options for changing the political status quo in Sudan - but for the moment, Bashir seems very much in charge, with his henchmen falling into line even as they mutter about an uncertain future.

FERNANDEZ